

Sprucing up a local landmark

By Mara Aimone
Reporter staff

DUXBURY — November marks the 25th anniversary of the renovation of the Girl Scout House, located on Washington Street just past Hall's Corner, and although the date will not go by unnoticed, it may not be accompanied with the fanfare of the 1965 dedication ceremony.

The anniversary commemorates the year 1965, when the late Helen Bumpus donated \$10,000 to the town to construct an addition to the building, add a bathroom and replace the old potbelly stove that warmed the former one room school house with a more modern heating system. More importantly, town meeting voted that the house would "always and forever be The Girl Scout House," according to Ruth Rowley, who was president of the Plymouth Bay Girl Scout Council from 1961 to 1966. That same year, the Girl Scout trefoil was hand carved and donated by Clarence Lod shortly after the dedication, and must always remain in place above the doorway.

The house looks clean and new from the outside but under the fresh coat of paint, the Girl Scout House shows the wear and tear of a long life. Joan Riser, current girl scout leader, believes that the building was one of four one room schoolhouses built around 1799. "It's hard to realize it's that old, but when you look at the windows and woodwork, you can tell."

Riser began fixing up the house this summer, with the help of Brownie leader Debbie Camuso, in preparation for a celebration of the anniversary. However they were unprepared for the magnitude of the job. "You don't really notice it until you look at it. It has old plaster walls, the roof leaked, the walls were disintegrating, the window frames were rotting." Riser's 15 year old daughter Susan, along with Susan DeHart, and Jennifer Tzamos, also 15, and all girl scouts, spent their summer vacation painting and cleaning the interior. With the help of the

tree department, Riser took down the Girl Scout trefoil that hangs above the doorway and gave it a fresh coat of spray-paint. The town agreed to pay for the installation of new drywall, and a senior organization has donated drapes. Riser said she will ask the Boy Scouts if they would paint the exterior trim in the spring, as a project for the troop. Despite their hard work, the anniversary celebration has been indefinitely postponed. "If we do it, then it will probably be after the holidays," said Riser.

Digging through the house, Riser and her helpers found old photo albums, pictures and uniforms tucked away in forgotten storage closets. An old picture from the '40s or '50s shows a little girl selling matchbook covers to raise money, quite a change from the cookies we come to expect every year. "I don't think that would work nowadays," Riser laughed, "I think we'll stick to cookies."

Some albums go back to when Frances Redlon Wolfe started the first Girl Scout troop in Duxbury in 1929. The troop consisted of eight girls from Wolfe's Sunday school class, and meetings were held in the Unitarian Church on Washington Street.

Riser has also delved into the history of the building itself in preparation for the celebration. The main part of the building, which was the original schoolhouse, has changed little from the days when it was the Old Nook School for grades one through four, except, of course, for the potbelly stove. "You almost wish they hadn't taken that out," said Riser. But, practicality wins out.

In the middle '50s when the school had outgrown the tiny building, town meeting voted to grant the Girl Scouts use of the house. Soon, the single room became too small for the expanding Girl Scout community, and a proposal was made to Helen Bumpus, philanthropist and naturalist, to donate the money for the construction of a new addition and other renovations to fix up the aging building. Bumpus,



GIRL SCOUT HOUSE —

Twenty-five years ago it was renovated. (Staff photo by Mara Aimone)

pus, who also donated the library's art gallery to the town, is remembered by Rowley as "one of those individuals that you present with an idea and she has the ability to see the potential of it."

The town voted to accept Bumpus' gift at the 1965 town meeting. In 1973 the town granted the Girl Scout's use and responsibility for maintaining the building. That same year, after exclusive use of the building for 20 years, the school committee asked to use the building to house the superintendent's office. The superintendent occupied the house for three and a half years, until space was found elsewhere. In 1977, the Girl Scouts moved back in, and have been using the building ever since. The building now houses the offices for the council on aging, as well as host scout meetings.

"It embodies the beauty of democracy and community spirit," said Rowley. "Everyone put their resources together to keep it up. People try to be generous, but we're all kind of forgetful that the resources come from within the community."